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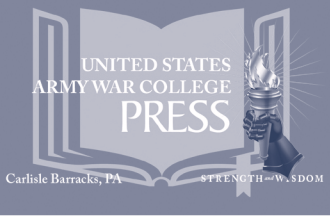

THE QUEST FOR MILITARY COOPERATION IN NORTH AFRICA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

Mohammed El-Katiri

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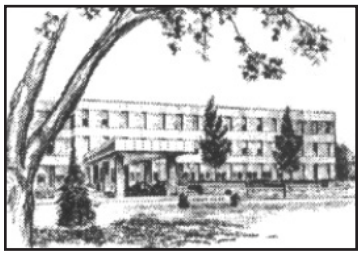

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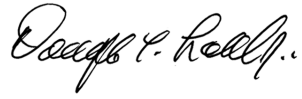
FOREWORD

In the aftermath of the ousting of dictatorial regimes in 2011, the fragile political and security situations in Tunisia and Libya have contributed to the emergence of new threats that menace the stability of both countries and of their neighbors. Severe terrorist incidents have become frequent throughout the region. To name but one incident, the borders that Algeria shares with those two countries exposed it to a major terrorist attack on the Tiguentourine gas facility in January 2013.

The existence and recognition of common threats has prompted military-to-military cooperation among most, but not all, North African countries. Algeria, a country with a sizable military capability, has started working closely with its neighbor countries to reduce terrorist threats. Over the last 3 years, Algeria and Tunisia in particular have intensified their military cooperation to tackle terrorist groups in Tunisia and fight against illicit trafficking across their respective borders.

Nevertheless, despite the acute need for a region-wide security cooperation framework, concrete achievements remain limited. There are a wide range of political and technical challenges that undermine any effective cooperation among the North African countries. The absence of a strong military institution in Libya that is able to control the entire Libyan territory has hindered effective security cooperation with that country. Strained relations between Algeria and Morocco are another dominant political issue that is depriving the region of important regional security and diplomatic synergies; this despite the fact that Morocco has a well-equipped and experienced military force and relatively strong political stability.

In this Letort Paper, British researcher Dr. Mohammed El-Katiri analyzes the North African security landscape in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, with particular focus on the security threats that are behind the inception of military-to-military cooperation among North African countries, and the relevance of these security dynamics to U.S. security and interests. The author also discusses key region-wide issues and challenges that are impeding region-wide security cooperation between all of the North African countries. This Letort Paper concludes with recommendations on how the United States could leverage its already existing military and development assistance to encourage close cooperation between North African countries, thus fostering the shared goals of security and stability.



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MOHAMMED EL-KATIRI is a Director of MENA Insight, a political risk consultancy that focuses on the Middle East and North Africa, and a Senior Research Analyst at the United Kingdom's (UK) Conflict Studies Research Centre (CSRC). Before joining CSRC, Dr. El-Katiri was a Research Fellow at the UK Defence Academy, and later served as a Political Risk Analyst at Eurasia Group and as a senior researcher at the Hague Institute for Global Justice. With more than 10 years of regional experience, his research interests include political and economic security in North Africa and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, as well as North African relations with the European Union, and security policies around the Mediterranean. Dr. El-Katiri has published numerous internal and external UK Defence Academy reports, including reference papers on national and regional security issues in the GCC and the Mediterranean, and a monograph on the Algerian national oil and gas company Sonatrach. In addition, his publications include commentaries and research papers in a range of languages for research organizations in the UK and Europe, as well as various newspaper articles in and about the region. Dr. El-Katiri is a frequent commentator in media, including the British Broadcasting Company, the *Financial Times*, and *Al-Jazeera*.

SUMMARY

The fragile political and security situations in Tunisia and Libya that followed Arab Spring upheavals have contributed to the emergence of new threats that menace the stability of both countries and their neighbors. Severe terrorist incidents have become frequent throughout the region. Algeria alone was targeted by several terrorist attacks that have been linked to Libya and Tunisia. To name but one incident, the borders that Algeria shares with the two countries exposed it to a major terrorist attack on the Tiguentourine gas facility in January 2013.

Confronted by these common threats, North African authorities have quickly recognized the importance of establishing military-to-military cooperation. A few security initiatives were launched among most, but not all, North African countries. Algeria, a country with a sizable military capability and experience in cross-border security cooperation, has intensified its efforts to build security cooperation arrangements with its neighboring countries to reduce cross-border security menaces, in particular terrorism threats. The main impetus behind Algeria's engagement and deployment of significant resources to help Tunisia and Libya with their internal security challenges has been a strong desire to maintain the country's relative stability. Over the last 3 years, for instance, Algeria and Tunisia in particular have intensified their military cooperation to tackle terrorist groups in Tunisia and fight against illicit trafficking across their respective borders.

Though there has been relative success in establishing bilateral security cooperation agreements focusing mainly on border security issues, attempts to build an effective regional security structure to face

many of the region's intertwined security challenges have failed. The failure to significantly expand cooperation to include all North African countries is attributed largely to three key factors:

- First, the current fluid political and security situation in Libya and Tunisia that has made it difficult for both countries to impose control over their territories and borders.
- Second, the existence of uneven and diverse military capabilities among North Africa's armed forces that hinders interoperability and effective military cooperation. The armed forces of these three countries have significant differences, qualitatively and quantitatively, in terms of their military equipment, training, and doctrines. This is further worsened by the lack of any history of regional exercises.
- Third, the long-standing dispute and rivalry between Algeria and Morocco remains a major obstacle to building any effective regional security cooperation.

This Letort Paper examines the North African security landscape in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, with particular focus on the security threats that prompted a couple of bilateral military-to-military cooperation arrangements among North African countries, and the relevance of these security dynamics to U.S. security and interests. It explains key issues and challenges impeding region-wide security cooperation encompassing all North African countries, and concludes with recommendations on how the United States could leverage its already existing military and development assistance to encourage close cooperation between North African countries, thus fostering the shared goals of security and stability.

THE QUEST FOR MILITARY COOPERATION IN NORTH AFRICA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

INTRODUCTION

The security landscape in North African countries has changed radically since the eruption of political turmoil in Tunisia in December 2010, the start of what is popularly known as the Arab Spring. The toppling of Egyptian, Tunisian, and Libyan leaders during 2011 did not result in a peaceful and uncomplicated transition for the new political regimes, but rather the opposite. Despite the tremendous differences between their post-2011 revolution political transitions,[1] Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya have one factor in common: their security situation has seriously deteriorated. The ongoing years-long violent conflict in Libya has posed serious challenges not only to Libyan society but also to its immediate neighboring countries to the west, Algeria and Tunisia. In addition to direct combat between armed militia forces, violent incidents in the form of car bombings, assassinations, tribal killings, and more have become almost a daily occurrence in many Libyan regions and cities. The collapse of state institutions in Libya, and the inability of its post-revolution governments to maintain order and control the country's borders, has had an immense impact on regional security. Jihadist groups have experienced significant growth since the fall of former Libyan leader Col. Muammar Qadhafi, and Libya has become an exporter of violence to its neighboring countries.

Meanwhile, the inability of Tunisian security forces to confront extremist groups within Tunisia effectively or to control their cross-border activities is

threatening Algeria. Unsurprisingly, Algeria has been one of the region's most vocal states in warning of the deterioration of regional security as a result of the sudden fall of regimes in its neighboring countries. Thus, Algerian officials did not welcome the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) intervention in Libya, and their recognition of the rebel National Transitional Council as Libya's de facto government was granted only after the death of Qadhafi.

Algerian estimates of the security risks were vindicated by events. The current North African landscape is characterized by an upsurge in terrorist attacks, along with cross border trafficking of arms, people, and drugs.

In this context, a growing demand for regional security cooperation has arisen. Several initiatives for regional and bilateral security cooperation have emerged. Algeria, until now relatively unaffected by the instability that is sweeping across the region, has played an important role in tackling these security threats and providing support to its neighboring countries. Algeria responded not only by increasing its security presence at its borders, but also by engaging in direct security cooperation with Libya and Tunisia in attempts to reduce both cross-border threats and challenges to internal stability. However, this new drive to foster security cooperation within the region remains governed by short-term necessity rather than a strategic vision to build an effective regional security architecture that capitalizes on the existing capabilities across the region. The exclusion of Morocco—another stable and militarily capable country—highlights this lack of a strategic approach.

This Letort Paper will concentrate mainly on the post-2011 revolutions security landscape in the fol-

lowing three North African countries: Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia. There is a range of reasons for focusing specifically on these three nations. They share common borders, and they have already launched several cooperative initiatives to strengthen their border security. By contrast, Egypt also shares long borders with Libya and has been directly affected in a variety of ways by the worsening of the security situation in Libya; but Egypt's cooperation with other North African countries has remained limited. Similarly, although Morocco has shown interest in cooperating and assisting to bring stability to the region, the country's participation was limited by North Africa's politics and geography. Morocco has not been directly affected by the security chaos happening in Libya or the increased terrorist attacks in Tunisia. Morocco is benefiting from not sharing any physical border with these two countries, and having Algeria as a security buffer. Political disputes between Algeria and Morocco have impeded Moroccan involvement in post-2011 security cooperation forums. Attempts to orchestrate a pan-North African response to the Libyan crisis have failed due to a divergence of political views. For instance, Algeria supported the Egyptian view that military intervention was required to stabilize Libya.

The first section of the Letort Paper will examine the North African security landscape in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, with particular focus on the security threats that lie behind the inception of military-to-military cooperation among North African countries. The second section will discuss the scope of current military cooperation arrangements in the region. The third section looks at the challenges that are still inhibiting the region from effectively constituting a regional security cooperation framework.

NORTH AFRICAN SECURITY: A DIRE STATE OF AFFAIRS

Libya.

Libya has been embroiled in armed conflict since early 2011, when several Libyan regions and tribes took up arms against their former leader, Col. Muammar Qadhafi. Successive interim governments have faced great difficulties in imposing control over the country's vast territory and long borders. Libya has approximately 4,000 km (2,485 miles) of land border shared with six countries, and 1,700 km (1,056 miles) of coastline.

After 2013, the security situation deteriorated drastically. Libya today is characterized by insecurity, violence, and deep political crisis. With the fall of Qadhafi, the state's administration and security apparatus collapsed partially or entirely.[2] This vacuum was quickly filled by a variety of revolutionary armed groups, who took the responsibility of maintaining law and order throughout the country without a unified command structure to oversee their work.[3] Any observer of the current Libyan political and security situations will be confused by a mosaic of militias and events, and trying to comprehend "who is who" is far from being an easy task. Ideology, money, identity, and immunity remain as the key factors that drive the behavior of armed groups and political parties in today's Libya.

Rivalry among these armed groups began almost immediately, and by now has deeply divided the country and society into different camps. At the time of this writing, fighting continues in Libya between the two main armed camps—Misrata-based armed

groups calling their Operation LIBYA DAWN (*Fajr Libya*), and Zintan-based militias and elements of the army commanded by General Khalifa Haftar conducting Operation DIGNITY (*al-Karama*). General Haftar's Operation DIGNITY was launched in May 2014 with a mandate to expel Islamist armed groups first from Benghazi, and then from other Libyan cities.[4] Over 2 years later, neither side has managed to make any significant expansion of territory under their control.[5]

The polarization of Libya is extending to other spheres. Libya remains divided between two governments and two parliaments that are jockeying for power and political legitimacy. Efforts by United Nations (UN) special representatives to establish a "unity government" have so far made little progress toward ending the political stalemate. The final political framework to form the Government of National Accord proposed by the UN Special Representative Bernardino Leon in October 2015 was not endorsed by all Libyan stakeholders.[6] At the time of this writing, the UN diplomats continue to broker a new version of the October 2015 power-sharing agreement in the hope that it will be acceptable to all parties.

There is almost a consensus among all the political parties and regions of Libya that successive governments since the fall of Qadhafi's regime have been weak and unable to handle the complexities of political transition and building state institutions. These governments have lacked a vision to rebuild the country, and did not have the capacity to deal with the many issues that Libya is currently facing. Members of these various governments are seen as indecisive and lacking firmness in situations when that virtue is very much needed.[7]

Lack of an effective centralized state security apparatus has meant that successive governments since 2012 have not been able to establish effective oversight, management, and control of the country's weapons arsenals. Considerable quantities of military materiel and weapons including small arms, heavy weapons, and ammunition, as well as mines, explosives, and missiles, are in the hands of militias, radical groups, and individuals.[8] Several Libyan armed groups have illegally seized energy facilities from the proper authorities as a way to access funds and pressure the elected government and state institutions for political concessions.[9]

The security apparatus, particularly the military, is highly politicized. The armed forces have divided their loyalties between the two fighting sides in Tripoli and Benghazi. The army has been captured by entrenched political and armed factions that emerged during the 2011 war and after the killing of Qadhafi. Several of its top officers have taken a side with one or another of the key political forces in the country. This politicization has further undermined any prospect of re-building the state institutions. Efforts by numerous countries and international organizations to provide support and capacity building for Libyan security institutions have been in vain.[10]

Another feature of post-Qadhafi Libya is the emergence of various violent extremist groups, such as Ansar al-Shari'a in Benghazi and in Darnah, as well as elements of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).[11] The so-called Islamic State has extended its presence and influence in several Libyan cities, and has been responsible for brutal group killings across Libya.[12] These radical groups have taken advantage of the absence of a strong government with an effective

security apparatus, the availability of weapons, and porous borders to grow and spread their influence across the country.

On the political front today, Libya is divided and paralyzed by rivalry between its various political groups and tribes. The country has two rival governments and parliaments, each backed by one of the two fighting camps and by a set of international actors. The interim government, which was appointed by the elected House of Representatives, has been pushed away from Tripoli to the eastern city of Tobruk by the Libya Dawn coalition of militias since August 2014. The second one is a self-declared government, known as the National Salvation Government, based in the Libyan capital and backed by some members of the former parliament and the Libya Dawn coalition. Both governments claim legitimacy, and both seem committed to keeping Libya a unified country.

Tunisia.

In Tunisia, the picture is less chaotic than Libya but far from ideal. The emergence of radical groups remains the main feature characterizing the post-Ben Ali political transition and security landscape. The mushrooming of terrorist groups in Tunisia has surprised Tunisians and international observers alike. Until 2011, Tunisia, with a comparatively well-educated populace with rising economic expectations, has had a limited history of violent extremism compared to neighboring Algeria or Libya. This was largely a consequence of the tight security policy implemented by security forces during Ben Ali's rule. Another factor has been the secular character that dominated most urban populations across most Tunisian terri-

tory. The number of terrorist attacks since the 1980s, an era that saw the emergence of Islamist movements across North Africa, was very limited before 2012.[13] The appearance and rise of the Ansar al-Shari'a and Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade came as result of a prolonged political instability within Tunisia and the porous borders with Libya. These two groups have been behind a series of terrorist attacks targeting civilians, political figures, and government forces, which have increased markedly over the past 3 years.

Tunisia continues to suffer from sporadic terrorist attacks, despite the banning of Ansar al-Shari'a and its designation as a terrorist organization in August 2013, and the launch of a major counter-terrorism operation under the leadership of former Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa in early 2014. At the time of this writing, the most recent deadly attack in urban areas had taken place in Sousse, a popular Tunisian holiday town. In June 2015, an armed terrorist killed about 40 people on the beach of one of Sousse's luxury hotels.[14] This was the second major terrorist attack in the country in less than half a year. On March 18, 2015, a group of terrorists fired on foreign tourists on a visit to the Bardo Museum in Tunis, the capital city of Tunisia, killing about 22 people.

These terrorist incidents have constituted a serious threat to the country's political transition and have had a devastating impact on the Tunisian economy. On the political front, these terrorist attacks have added more strain to an already problematic and polarized political divide between moderate Islamists and other secular political parties. The victory of the Islamist party, Ennahda, in the National Constituent Assembly elections in October 2011 was never accepted by some Tunisian secularist parties.[15] Since then, the two political camps have been in open confrontation with each

other. For instance, on February 8, 2013—2 days after the assassination of Chokri Belaid, a leftist politician from the opposition—Tunisia experienced another cycle of political instability, when liberal-secular activists took to the streets to protest against the Islamist-led government. Protestors were blaming Ennahda for the growing extremism and associated violence in the country.[16] In economic terms, the vital tourism sector was severely affected by the various terrorist attacks, depriving the economy of important foreign currency proceeds and employment opportunities. The tourism sector employs about half a million people and contributes 7.4 % of the country's gross domestic product (GDP).[17]

The concentration of terrorists in Mount Chaambi, the mountainous area of the Kasserine governorate near the border with Algeria, is still posing a challenge both to Tunisian and Algerian stability. This region of Tunisia has seen a series of violent confrontations between Tunisian armed forces and extremist militants since 2012.[18]

The Tunisian security forces, including its armed forces, were overwhelmed by the sudden change in the security threat landscape internally and at the country's borders. The current Tunisian president, Béji Caïd Essebsi, explained the situation of his country during a visit to Algiers in February 2015, saying that: "Tunisians have no previous experience with terrorism. We never had any terrorism. It's a new thing for us. And I think that Tunisians cannot effectively solve the problem by themselves."[19]

The Tunisian armed forces are undermanned, under-equipped, and lacking in training to engage in anti-terrorism operations. These problems were not a result of the 2011 revolution. They were the consequence of years of under-investment in developing

and expanding Tunisia's military capabilities. The limited achievements of the Tunisian armed forces' various campaigns against Ansar al-Sharia and AQIM have given rise to criticism from the government, and led to the resignation of Chief of Staff General Rachid Ammar in June 2013.[20] With its difficult economic situation since 2011, the Tunisian government has not been able to make the necessary investment in the country's armed forces in order to fight militant groups effectively. Consequently, the country is now more dependent on external assistance in the form of training, equipment, and intelligence. The United States and Algeria have become the main providers of military assistance to Tunisia since the ousting of Ben Ali in January 2011. For instance, the U.S. government has been increasing its military assistance and training to help the Tunisian state overcome its security challenges.[21]

Algeria.

Although Algeria did not experience protests and instability on similar scales to those seen in Tunisia and Libya, the country has been affected by the increasing instability within those neighboring countries. Over the last 4 years, several terrorist attacks targeting Algeria have been linked to Libya and Tunisia. Terrorists had either been trained in Libya, or received weapons and logistical support from Tunisian and Libyan extremist groups. From the early days of the Arab Spring protests, Algerian security and governmental officials were alarmed by the potential consequences of instability on their immediate eastern borders. They were concerned because instability in Libya and Tunisia would open an entirely new front for the Algerian security establishment.

The Algerian government and military responded quickly and took precautionary measures to protect the country's borders with Libya for fear of possible terrorist incidents. The Algerian army launched a large-scale surveillance and security operation along the joint border during the early months of 2011, before the fall of Qadhafi's regime. The Algerian Ministry of Interior also mobilized tribal leaders in the south of Algeria to provide support to surveillance operations by a variety of national security forces.[22] Algerian military and political elites were particularly concerned about AQIM exploiting the security vacuum in Libya and across the borders to carry out attacks within Algeria.

The worsening of the security situation since 2011 in the Maghreb has added more pressure on the Algerian regime. Algeria was already committing significant amounts of security materiel and personnel resources to monitoring and protecting its borders in the south with Mali and Mauritania, as well as the Western border with Morocco. To hinder potential attacks by armed terrorist groups and the infiltration of arms, Algeria has deployed about 50,000 troops along its border with Libya.[23]

These early fears proved to be correct. Since 2012, the Algerian security authorities have repeatedly announced seizures of weapons smuggled from Libya.[24] In January 2013, Algeria suffered a terrorist attack on the In Amenas gas facility in the Tinguentourine region, about 1,300 km (800 miles) southeast of the Algerian capital Algiers, but only about 60 km (40 miles) west of the Libyan border. Algerian officials have stated that vehicles and arms used in the attack on In Amenas came from Libya. This terrorist attack, that took the lives of about 38 local and international workers, deeply shocked the Algerian political and military

elites. It constituted a major blow to the reputation of the Algerian security establishment's experience and expertise in fighting against terrorism.

Furthermore, Algeria's internal security has not been perfect. Extremist groups, including AQIM, have sporadically attacked governmental institutions, security personnel, and foreigners. The country has also experienced popular uprisings and inter-community conflicts in a variety of regions. For instance, Algeria has witnessed sporadic clashes in the southern city of Ghardaia and its environs, known as the M'zab Valley, between Algerian Sunni and Ibadi Muslims over the last 2 years.[25] The number of protests by young men demanding jobs, housing, and other socio-economic benefits in various southern Algerian towns has increased since 2011. The inhabitants of these peripheral regions feel that, although their land is rich in resources, most well paid jobs go to residents from the Northern provinces or to foreigners, including sometimes positions that require no sophisticated skills.

These internal challenges to the country and to government stability demand significant political attention and security resources. Since 2011, the Algerian government has become more attentive to the demands of the local elites and of ordinary people in these poor and marginalized provinces. Several Algerian ministers have traveled frequently to hold meetings with notables of Algeria's southern cities and the provinces of Tamnarasset, Ghardaia, and Illzi. There is one common demand raised by representatives of the region in all these meetings, which is that more attention must be paid to the region's socio-economic needs.

The hydrocarbon bonanza of the last decade, and the high public spending to revitalize and diversify

the economy that accompanied it, was not without its shortcomings. Increased public spending carried with it several unintended socio-political consequences. The recent flow of public money to build infrastructures or to support the private sector has further contributed not only to rising incomes but also to wealth inequality among Algerians, and has mainly benefited those who are in power and their entourage. This ill-managed distribution of public resources across the country's regions and social groups has led to widespread social malaise.

While not wishing to become directly involved, Algeria had no interest in seeing radical changes in its neighboring countries or in supporting such change. This has been evidenced by Algeria's cautious diplomatic stances during 2011. Algeria disagreed with the majority of Arab countries on the suspension of Libyan membership in the Arab League in February 2011; neither did it support NATO intervention to topple the Qadhafi regime. During a meeting of the Arab League on March 12, 2011, Algeria was one of the few Arab countries that opposed a resolution that called on the UN Security Council to establish a no-fly zone over Libya. During the Arab League debates, Algeria argued that allowing such a foreign intervention would destabilize the country and the entire region.[26] Algeria's political and military elites have never been comfortable with the idea of a presence on the ground of a Western or any other foreign military in its immediate borders. Finally, Algeria was the last Arab neighboring country to recognize Libya's National Transitional Council (NTC) as legitimate representatives of the Libyan people. Algeria's tacit recognition took place during a meeting with representatives of the NTC only a few weeks before the killing of Qadhafi in October 2011.

CURRENT STATE OF SECURITY COOPERATION

It quickly became evident for North African leaders that the cross-border security threats facing their countries were interlinked and could not be solved at a national level, but instead required a regional approach. It also became clear that the lack of a regional security architecture constituted a weakness in effective tackling of cross-border threats, and restoring peace and stability in the region.

These factors contribute to the leading role that Algeria has played to support regional stability since 2011. Algeria has seen cooperation with its neighboring countries as a rational step to maintaining its own stability and prosperity. Sharing both a long border and strong social and cultural ties with Libya and Tunisia, Algeria was alarmed by the deterioration of the security situation in the region, particularly in Libya, and the implications for national security of arms and people smuggling across its borders.

Algeria's relative political stability, counter-terrorism experience, military capabilities, and geographic location have a made it a partner of choice for the Tunisian and Libyan security and political authorities. As political upheaval has raged in many parts of the Middle East and North Africa, Algeria, just like Morocco, has shown a remarkable degree of resilience against a regional contagion. The country has managed to maintain a degree of political stability despite recurring protests and widespread social malaise. Protests of one sort or another continue to be regular events across Algerian cities and regions, but they have not constituted a threat to the stability of the government or country.

Algeria possesses substantial armed forces, and is the biggest military spender in the entire African continent. In 2013, Algeria was the first African country to spend more than $10 billion U.S. dollars on its military.[27] Benefiting from high oil export revenues since 2004, Algeria has dedicated an important percentage of its GDP to modernizing its armed forces to confront a variety of threat scenarios, and achieve its ambition for regional hegemonic power.

Algeria has built up considerable experience and expertise in fighting terrorist groups over the last 25 years. The confrontation between the Algerian security apparatus and different extremist groups dates back to 1992, when the Algerian military establishment suspended a second round of elections to prevent a victorious Islamist party (the Islamic Salvation Front, known by its French acronym FIS) from leading the government. The cancelation of election results had sparked a confrontation between armed Islamist organizations, particularly the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and Islamic Salvation Army, and Algerian state forces, which lasted for more than a decade.[28] This extended conflict witnessed the use of a variety of terrorist attacks on military and civilian targets, and resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Algerians. The end of the civil war in the early 2000s did not mean the end of terrorism. Algeria has faced, since then, a variety of successive terrorist groups, including the GIA, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, and AQIM.[29] Today, AQIM continues to pose a daily threat to the lives of Algerian security and government personnel and foreign workers.

Algeria has also accumulated practical experience in cross-border collaboration to tackle similar security threats, with a difference in scale, to the one that it

is currently facing on its eastern borders with Libya and Tunisia. In 2010, Algeria established and hosted a joint command headquarters, known as the Joint Operation Staff Committee, in the southern Algerian city of Tamanrasset to facilitate liaison with its immediate southern neighbors, namely Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.[30] The main purpose behind the setting up of this military structure was to coordinate military operations to combat violent extremist organizations and illegal trafficking in the Sahara. This regional security initiative, with all the challenges that it has faced since its inception, has been a steep learning curve for Algeria on how to handle cross-border security cooperation and coordination as well as how to develop effective mechanisms to combat terror and crime in all their forms.

Early attempts at security cooperation in this North African sub-region have been exclusively bilateral, which came as a natural response to the deterioration of the border security of all countries involved. Efforts to establish a tripartite (Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia) security architecture did not yield any results. The first meeting between the prime ministers of Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia was held in January 2013, in the Libyan oasis of Ghadames, to discuss measures to secure the common borders.[31] However, there was no serious follow-up after this meeting. These countries have failed to operationalize their initial agreement to create joint committees to coordinate and oversee joint patrol missions. The main obstacle that hindered the development of this regional security structure has been the complex political and security situation in Libya.

The level of Algerian-Tunisian security cooperation evolved with time. From late 2012, cooperation started with an ad hoc exchange of information between the security forces of both countries, and evolved with an expansion of security cooperation areas. The previous Tunisian Minister of National Defense Ghazi Jeribi described his country's cooperation with Algeria:

> Tunisian-Algerian military cooperation is being looked at with great interest from both sides. We have worked to support and develop this and move towards true partnership in the fields of training and exchanging experience, including responding to the requirements of the two national armies and enhancing their operational capabilities.[32]

In May 2014, Tunisia and Algeria formalized their security cooperation by signing a border security cooperation agreement to combat cross-border terrorism and organized crime. The agreement aims to facilitate the coordination of joint operations to ensure border security, sharing of information and intelligence, and exchange of experience and expertise through training and joint exercises. After this agreement was signed, meetings between Algerian and Tunisian senior officials and officers have been frequent to coordinate their efforts and exchange information and perspectives.

Tunisia's push for this security partnership was not only driven by geographic factors. Algeria's security forces are among the best-equipped and trained to fight extremist groups across the Middle East and in Africa, and the Algerian security apparatus has accumulated more than 2 decades of experience in fighting terrorism internally. From Algeria's perspective, cooperating with Tunisian security forces will

enhance Algeria's ability to collect intelligence and to effectively pursue terrorists within Tunisian territory.

Since the fall of Qadhafi in late 2011, Algerian and Libyan officers and officials have met on many occasions to discuss measures to ensure the security of their 1,000 km (621 mile) bilateral land border. The Libyan National Transitional Council (NTC) approached Algeria in the early months of 2012 asking for support to protect the shared border while Libya was building its own professional border guard. Early discussions of bilateral cooperation between Algerian and post-Qadhafi Libyan authorities started on the margin of a regional security conference, the Ministerial Regional Border Security Conference, held in Libya in March 2012. Algeria and Libya took advantage of this ministerial meeting to sign a bilateral agreement to strengthen border security cooperation. The agreement, in principal, focused on the training of Libyan police and security personnel by Algeria, the conduct of joint operations to maintain border security, and exchange of information between their border control authorities. During the same meeting, both parties deliberated on the creation of a bilateral committee on borders that would expand and diversify areas of cooperation, including security and the socio-economic development of border regions.[33] However, no concrete measures were adopted as a follow up to this agreement.

More than a year later, and with a new government in Libya led by Ali Zeidan, Algeria offered to train Libyan police and military forces during a visit by the Algerian Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal to Tripoli in December 2013. With the exception of a few visits by Libyan delegations, no actual training was provided. Current cooperation between the

two countries has therefore been limited to occasional intelligence sharing. This scant progress is a direct consequence of the deteriorating political and security situation in Libya, which has made endeavors for security cooperation unrealistic. It is also a reflection of the lack of confidence on the Libyan side about the stance and intentions of the Algerian regime vis-a-vis the National Transitional Council and post-Qadhafi political leadership, following Algeria's ambiguous attitude toward the Libyan civil war during 2011. In addition, the Algerian authorities have provided refuge for several members of the Qadhafi family.[34] Meanwhile, Algeria has quietly attempted to collaborate on an ad hoc basis with a number of dominant militias that hold power on the ground in Libya, but these attempts have never been officially announced.

CHALLENGES FOR SECURITY REGIONAL COOPERATION

Though all North African countries—and perhaps a variety of their international partners—have recognized the need for an effective regional security architecture to face the variety of intertwined regional security challenges, the outcome has been disappointing. At least three main factors have curbed enthusiasm and hindered the attempts made by North African countries to establish an effective regional security cooperation framework, namely: the fluid political and security situation in Libya and Tunisia; the existence of uneven and diverse military capabilities that complicate interoperability and cooperation; and finally, a fraught relationship between Algeria and Morocco.

Fluid and Uncertain Political and Security Situation.

Despite the desire to create a tripartite security architecture—by Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia—to respond to rising security threats, several political and security factors have limited the achievement of this goal. A combination of continuous political instability and security chaos in Libya has impeded any effective cooperation among the three countries. The continuing churn of political leadership, either at ministerial level or of senior officers in security organizations in Libya, has made it impossible to materialize any of the tripartite agreements. This constant change of personnel has hindered any trust-building initiatives among security officers and institutions from the three countries.

Furthermore, the politicization of the military in Libya since the death of Qadhafi is another factor that has complicated the picture for Algerian and Tunisian officers and officials.[35] Algeria and Tunisia want to maintain a neutral position towards internal political competition in Libya. Neither has any interest in being perceived as favoring one political group or ideology over the other. In addition, the situation has not been made easier by the ambiguous position and powers of armed militias within the Libyan security apparatus. These same reasons have impeded any effective collaboration on a bilateral basis between Libya on the one hand, and Algeria and Tunisia on the other.

Uneven and Diverse Military Capabilities.

A lack of effective cross-border cooperation among the three North African countries has also been caused by a mismatch of technological and other military

capabilities. The armed forces of these three countries have significant differences, qualitatively and quantitatively, in terms of their military equipment, training, and doctrines. They also have almost no history of cooperating or exercising together. The few occasions where military officers of the three countries have exercised together have been within the framework of the 5+5 Western Mediterranean Defence initiative, a multilateral initiative that groups 10 Northern African and Southern European countries. Though military exercises are considered an essential part of this regional defense and security cooperation initiative's work, most of these exercises have been restricted in scope and duration and have focused mainly on naval and air operations.[36] Their purpose has been primarily strengthening mutual trust and understanding between the participating multinational forces, and they were not designed with the intention of achieving an interoperable joint capability. There have been no specific military exercises dedicated to border patrolling, intelligence sharing, or combating terrorists in difficult terrain.

Lessons learned by the Algerian military from other security cooperation experiences with southern neighbors have not resolved the interoperability challenges faced with Libya and to a lesser extent with Tunisia. Overcoming such challenges requires coordination of resources and conducting of joint training exercises. In addition, the most severe challenge has been a lack of interoperable communication systems that are essential for any cross-border military operations. Libyan and Tunisian security forces have been unable to secure their territories; they lack the equipment, trained personnel, and financial resources to conduct surveillance and reconnaissance operations,

and even to share information with their Algerian partners in a timely manner.

Stiff Relations Between Algeria and Morocco.

Relations between Algeria and Morocco have historically been tense. The two countries fought each other in 1963 over border issues and during the 1970s over the Western Sahara. Their bilateral relations have particularly deteriorated since 1994 when both countries closed their borders following a terrorist attack in the Moroccan tourist city of Marrakesh. Morocco imposed visa restrictions on Algerian citizens after the involvement of a few French citizens with Algerian backgrounds in this terrorist incident; Algeria responded by imposing visa restrictions on Moroccans and closing its land borders with Morocco.

Recent attempts to put Algerian and Moroccan hegemonic ambitions aside and combine their efforts for the stability of the region have not been successful. In 2012, there were high hopes among some North African leaders and international observers that the rapid changes occurring in the North Africa and Sahel strategic environments would provide a new impetus to revive an existing cooperative framework, the Arab Maghreb Union (known with its French acronyms as UMA). This was evident from numerous political statements issued by the Tunisian president Moncef Marzouki. He set the reviving of the UMA as an important goal in his foreign policy agenda. During his first tour to North African countries in February 2012, he declared that: "We will work to restore unity with our brothers in Algeria, Morocco, Libya and Mauritania," hoping that the leaders of the region would work together to overcome hindrances that had halted regional cooperation for more than 2 decades.[37]

These early initiatives by the Tunisian president seemed to have motivated other leaders. However, against the hope of many political leaders in North Africa, competition between Algeria and Morocco for a regional hegemonic role intensified and extended to the Sahel region. The Moroccan and Algerian regimes have engaged in a race since 2012 to play a leading role in mediating the Mali crisis. They have also competed to host and support dialogue among Libyan political factions.

The rivalry between Algeria and Morocco for regional leadership is another stumbling block to building an effective regional security cooperation mechanism. Algeria and Morocco are the main two military powers in North Africa in terms of the size of their armed forces, their capabilities, and experience. Moroccan authorities have shown interest in contributing to any efforts to stabilize the region. Despite the fact that Morocco does not share borders with Tunisia or Libya, the Moroccan leadership is also concerned by the increased radicalization and the uncontrolled flow of weapons in the region.

Nevertheless, another source of concern to Morocco is the potential instability of Algeria. A sudden fall of the current Algerian political regime could have far-reaching consequences for Moroccan security. The fall of the Qadhafi regime in Libya, and its consequences for both neighbors and rivals in the Maghreb and Sahel regions, provides a sobering case study. Despite the rivalry between the two countries, Morocco thus has a vested interest in continuing Algerian stability.[38]

Algeria's efforts to exclude Morocco from regional security cooperation arrangements have been counterproductive, depriving Libya and Tunisia of the capabilities offered by the Moroccan security apparatus.

Morocco's political stability and security capabilities could be a substantial reinforcement to efforts made by Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia to tackle these cross-border challenges. One result is that security cooperation remains primarily focused on protecting borders instead of addressing capability and capacity development of countries in need—and in the case of Libya, even the borders are incompletely covered.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The absence of a regional security architecture in North Africa is a handicap to restoring stability in Tunisia and Libya, and containing any further threats to the security of the region. The existing bilateral military-to-military cooperation that has characterized the North African geopolitical scene since the erupting of 2011 popular upheavals remains a positive shift. However, there is currently limited prospect that these bilateral security arrangements will lead to any substantial result in eradicating cross border threats, or evolve to become a region-wide mechanism.

The rivalry between Algeria and Morocco over regional influence remains the main challenge to broadening security cooperation to include all North African countries. Decades of rivalry have contributed to animosity and mistrust between the two countries. The continuing Libyan security and political chaos that further exacerbates the fragile stability of its neighboring countries is certainly another important factor that has impeded effective regional cooperation. Algeria has apparently seen in this security crisis on its eastern borders an opportunity to play a hegemonic role and gain influence in the region. Against the early hopes and expectations of some North African politi-

cal leaders, both Algeria and Morocco will continue to evaluate the geopolitical changes in the region for opportunities to strengthen and reinforce their respective positions of power.

If there is one lesson to be learned from the last 4 years of attempts at cross-border cooperation in North Africa, it is that establishing effective security cooperation is impossible without a range of specific factors and conditions. It requires financial resources, equipment, and appropriate political conditions within each country, as well as the obvious—a healthy degree of trust among these countries. In the absence of these conditions, North Africa is likely to be in need of continuous support from international partners to establish a regional security mechanism that allows it to meet its security challenges and ensure stability. This is a role that could be played by the U.S. Department of Defense, building on and exploiting its already existing engagements with the majority of North African countries on a bilateral basis.

In particular, the Department of Defense could leverage its existing and planned military assistance programs to encourage and facilitate closer defense and security cooperation among North African countries. Key areas that need immediate attention to increase the effectiveness of existing joint operations among North African countries are:

- Improving interoperability at a technical level between North African militaries;
- Providing specific training in tactics, techniques, and procedures suitable for joint operations; and,
- Organizing and supporting region-wide military exercises with a special focus on the kind of cross-border threats that these countries are exposed to.

For instance, the U.S. government has announced an increase in its military assistance to Tunisia as a way to both assist the country's political transition and combat terrorism. If part of this assistance were spent on enhancing the interoperability of the Tunisian armed forces and security bodies with those of its close North African neighbors, the effect of this U.S. military investment would be multiplied and the outcomes more sustainable. U.S. investment in such a capability will help ensure that Tunisia is able to effectively exploit the synergies of joining military capabilities with its neighbors to contain and/or eradicate current cross-border threats.

Recognizing that competition between two regional powers remains a primary obstacle to greater cooperation, the U.S. Department of State with support from other government departments involved in the region should encourage Algeria and Morocco to engage in direct political talks to overcome their political differences. Reconciling these two U.S. partners, or at the least assisting them in finding joint interests, would greatly improve the chances of establishing a regional security organization in North Africa that has the requisite means, material, support and experience to combat terrorism and other forms of cross-border crimes. The defense and security capabilities of both countries, if properly applied, could also be of great significance to any international effort to stabilize Libya and rebuild its security institutions.

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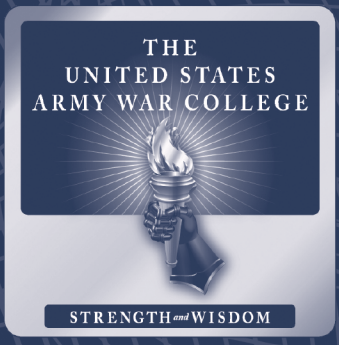

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